

Human Resources Update

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Welcome to the HR Update

- by Barb Daigle, Associate Vice-President, Human Resources



This issue of the HR Update deals with aspects of the University's strategic goal to build a culture of high performance.

As explained in the articles that follow, the high performance culture does not mean working longer hours, or taking on ever more tasks. Indeed, as Pat Katz writes on page 2, that view of performance is ultimately counter productive. Even if you do not burn out, you may negatively affect those around you.

On page 3, Donalda Cormier describes an essential element of the high performance organization – the ability to give and receive constructive feedback. And on page 4, Richard Florizone writes that, in a dynamic, changing environment, we could go crazy if we tried to do everything. Sometimes we have to make uncomfortable choices.

High performance is a form of personal mastery – knowing who you are, confronting the reality of the situation, and taking action to ensure you are acting consistently with your commitments. To be high performers we must take the time needed to reflect on those commitments and to set priorities for action.

A common theme running throughout this newsletter is the ongoing need for dialogue. We can't set priorities in isolation. We need to talk to each other to make sure the essential tasks get completed.

As always, we look forward to your comments and suggestions.

Upcoming Events

Workshop

Franklin Covey – 7 Habits of Highly Effective People and 4 Roles of Leadership.

This five day workshop is spread out over a couple of months. We need at least 25 people committed to participating in the complete workshop to proceed. If you are interested, please contact Sandra Friesen at Sandra.friesen@usask.ca.



What's The Message In Your Model? Is It Helping or Harming

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Does any of this sound familiar? You come in early to get a jump on the day's work. You take no breaks and schedule working lunches every day. You stay late to finish up the paperwork before heading out to an evening meeting.

You move fast. You talk fast. You take calls as you stride through the building. Your conversations are all business. You send email messages from home at 1:00 in the morning. (Don't think they're not noticing the time on the message.)

Your car is parked in its regular spot in the company lot most weekends and stat holidays.

You haven't taken many - certainly not all - of your holidays for years. There's always too much work to be done to take much time off.

Your home runs itself. You've long since negotiated the services to handle personal needs. Your family is self-sufficient. You drop in at events as your schedule permits. They're accustomed to it.

You've worked hard and you're reaping the rewards: influence, challenge, pay, benefits, position, status. You love your work. In fact, your work is your hobby, and it suits you just fine. You have no complaints.

So, what's the problem?

Well, if this kind of schedule meets your needs and interests, your health is good, and the pace is acceptable to the loves in your life, then all may be fine - for you.

Problems arise when colleagues and employees look at your behaviour as the blue ribbon standard for success and advancement. If they try to

emulate a pattern that's not a fit with their values, their interests, or their stage of life, then there will be a problem - for them and for you.

If capable individuals are turning down opportunities to step into positions of greater responsibility because they don't see themselves working that long and that hard, then your organization has a problem.

As a leader, a manager, or a CEO, you set the tone for all who work with you. The last thing you want is for your zeal and enthusiasm to end up crippling your best people or sabotaging succession. Here's how to set a positive tone and assure that your everyday actions reflect your best intentions.

- Make sure your work habits really are healthy for you and for your relationships. Do a reality check and don't base it solely on your own feelings. Ask for input from significant others in your life. How satisfied are they with your choices? Check your physical health with medical pros.
- Recognize that there are minimal requirements for most positions, and that there are discretionary and voluntary contributions that people make of their own volition. Let it be known, that some of your 'overtime' is not an essential requirement of the job. Make the distinction that some of your extra hours are a way of volunteering for something you believe in - much like a colleague's equally valuable choice to coach a youngster's ball team, or help out with a community project.
- Learn about the current stage of life of the employees and leaders who are following in your footsteps. Show an interest in their lives outside of work. Ask them how their work responsibilities are affecting

their personal lives. Be open to discussing problems and flexible in addressing conflicts.

- Share your own experiences and challenges in handling workloads and addressing work-life conflicts. Though you may be happily working extraordinary hours at this point in your career, it may not always have been so. You may have struggled along the way to make time for family or education. Say so. Put a human face on the position you fill and the path you've walked.
- Actively monitor workloads and resources. When you delegate new tasks and initiatives ask these questions: What impact will this have on the work you already have on the go? Do we need to make any adjustments? When you open this discussion, you go a long way towards making it safe for colleagues to speak to issues of load.
- Understand that your actions will speak louder than any words or corporate policies. Know what your behaviour is saying. Understand the impact. Adjust the message as necessary.

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Dialogue a Cornerstone of High Performance



Consultant Donalda Cormier gets to work with a wide variety of businesses and organizations, including the University of Saskatchewan, where she leads highly regarded workshops on increasing personal effectiveness.

Through her work, Donalda has observed that a key characteristic setting high performing organizations apart is the ability to give and receive feedback.

"When I encounter a high performance organization, I consistently see that the people dialogue about everything. The organization is a place of openness where people learn from every interaction. Their willingness to give and receive feedback creates a pool of shared meaning and understanding that helps everyone perform at a higher level," she said.

The feedback does not just flow from the top down, but in all directions – up, down and sideways.

"In a high performing organization, people don't wait to give feedback, or leave it to the leaders to respond. Whoever observes the behavior and is closest at hand takes responsibility for giving the feedback."

Often, the prospect of giving or receiving feedback produces a "clench" response. We hold our breath and prepare for the worst.

"When people hold different views on matters that are important to them, it's easy for emotions to run high," said Donalda. "But dialogue is a skill and there are techniques that can help you get better at it."

"I encourage people to view feedback simply as information. We all have blind spots – things that we don't recognize about ourselves but others see right away. Feedback helps us to see ourselves in action. If we focus on the question 'what can I learn from this?' the feedback will ultimately help

us to better align our actions with our commitments."

"My main thought about the annual evaluation interview is that there should be no surprises in the conversation," said Donalda. "To be effective, feedback should be given as close as possible to the situation, not saved up and dumped all at once. The annual interview should focus more on commitments and priorities."

She notes that feedback is not only the responsibility of supervisors. Each employee also shares responsibility for

helping to take the emphasis off the annual interview and make feedback an ongoing process. "Don't wait for your supervisor to initiate, ask for feedback," she said.

At the basis of successful feedback is an atmosphere of trust.

"When people are committed to my success – and I know that – then I can hear all kinds of feedback and our relationship will become stronger over time. That's why I always say, 'start with the heart'."

Four steps to constructive feedback

When you observe behavior that you feel warrants feedback, either positive or negative, Donalda Cormier offers these suggestions for preparing yourself to enter a fruitful dialogue. These lessons apply just as much to your personal life as they do to the workplace.

1. Begin with commitment, or "start with the heart"

Before giving feedback, ask yourself, 'what am I committed to – for myself, for the other person, for the relationship?' Give the feedback in the context of this underlying commitment.

2. Focus on the facts

Separate what really happened from your interpretation of what happened. In other words, focus on the facts and avoid making judgments.

3. Understand your feelings

Get clear in your mind the feelings you are experiencing. They might be fear, anger, sadness, happiness or excitement. Understand what has caused those feelings and how your feelings might influence the feedback you are about to give.

4. Consider the consequences of the behavior

Ask yourself 'what will be the result of the behavior I have observed - on me, on the other person, on the workplace?'

Once you have completed these steps, you should be in a position to offer constructive feedback that will benefit you, your co-worker and the organization.

Getting Comfortable With Being Uncomfortable

- by Richard Florizone, Vice-President (Finance and Resources)



With a new year just getting underway, I've been reflecting on the university workplace environment and thinking about my approach to my own work. We certainly are a very busy and complex organization. Colleges, administrative units, research centres and subsidiary companies each face their own set of unique challenges and opportunities. Collectively, we have a strategic direction that calls for us to measure ourselves against the very best. That means growth and change, which can be uncomfortable.

So what do we do about being uncomfortable? Certainly the first thing that comes to mind when faced with discomfort is to try to avoid it or remove the cause. But in many cases that's not possible or even desirable, and we have to get "comfortable with being uncomfortable." To explain what I mean, let me use an example:

A few years ago my wife and I had our first child. Those of you who have raised a family know what a life-transforming experience that is. My priorities were dramatically altered overnight. I also found that life simply became more busy and complicated. In those early weeks and months after my child's birth, I found myself trying to juggle all of my old priorities and deal with the new demands of a newborn and family life. I felt like I was run off my feet, but never like I was solving "the

problem." I eventually realized that I couldn't do it all; and that if I wanted to spend time with my wife and daughter, I had to make some choices. I had to give up my old ways of doing things, and get comfortable with things that used to make me uncomfortable—like having the worst lawn on our street.

I think this lesson holds well in the workplace. We are facing a lot of change in the university and, like having that first child, it can be both rewarding and challenging. So how do we get comfortable with being uncomfortable? Personally I'm focusing on three strategies:

The first is to clarify my commitments and revisit my priorities. Every once in a while I need to step back and reflect on the commitments I make in my life, both personal and professional. Then I need to continuously review and adjust my priorities so they allow me to follow through on those commitments. We're in a dynamic environment, and you'll go crazy if you try to do everything. So just like home life, I am choosing what I do and don't do.

Second, I'm trying to be rigorous about living up to those priorities. It's one thing to "pay lip service" to your priorities and quite another to actually implement them. For example, I might tell myself that my family is my number one priority, but if I choose to

continuously arrive home later than promised I'm really not making a difference. It's the same with work. Not only do we have to identify our priorities, we have to actually focus our day-to-day activity on them.

Third, I'm trying to get more comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty. The University of Saskatchewan is an organization committed to continuous improvement. That implies continuous change, which gives rise to a certain amount of uncertainty. This uncertainty is part of the dynamic and rewarding environment we live in, so while we need to find strategies to manage it, we can't eliminate it.

Woven throughout all these strategies is the need to communicate. I can't make commitments, set priorities, and adjust to change in isolation. I need to talk with my family, my boss, and my co-workers. That continuous, ongoing conversation is the only way I can stay on track and get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

I hope you find these ideas helpful. I'd be happy to hear any feedback you might have.